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Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review
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Developments in Indochina

This publication is prepared by the Far East Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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President Thieu apparently intends to go through with his earlier planned visit to several capitals in Southeast Asia as a goodwill gesture. The South Vietnamese have carried out heavy air strikes against Communist military and administrative areas in Kontum Province. Reports are circulating about rivalry between Prime Minister Khiem and Information Commissioner Hoang Duc Nha.

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North Vietnamese leaders Le Duan and Pham
Van Dong will travel to the USSR later
this month for consultations and the
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CAMBODIA

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Despite the problems that exist between the Khmer and Vietnamese Communists, there is evidence that the Cambodians are still dependent on their Vietnamese mentors for military guidance and support.

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Vietnamese advisers are directing the insurgent war effort--even though most of the troops are Khmer. Other ralliers, prisoners, --while less categorical about Hanoi's control over the conflict--also report the presence of Vietnamese advisers in some insurgent units.

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The extent of the advisory effort is unclear, but there is little doubt that the Khmer Communists still rely heavily on the Vietnamese for the delivery of arms, ammunition, and other war materiel.

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it was most dramatically underscored by Sihanouk himself, in a press interview in Romania on 30 June. Sihanouk contended that--in line with the terms of the Paris Agreement--the Chinese and the North Vietnamese had ended their deliveries of arms and ammunition to the Khmer insurgents. He then went on to say that, acting on an urgent request from his "defense minister," Khieu Samphan, he had called in the Chinese and North Vietnamese ambassadors to Romania to ask them for a resumption of arms and ammunition deliveries.

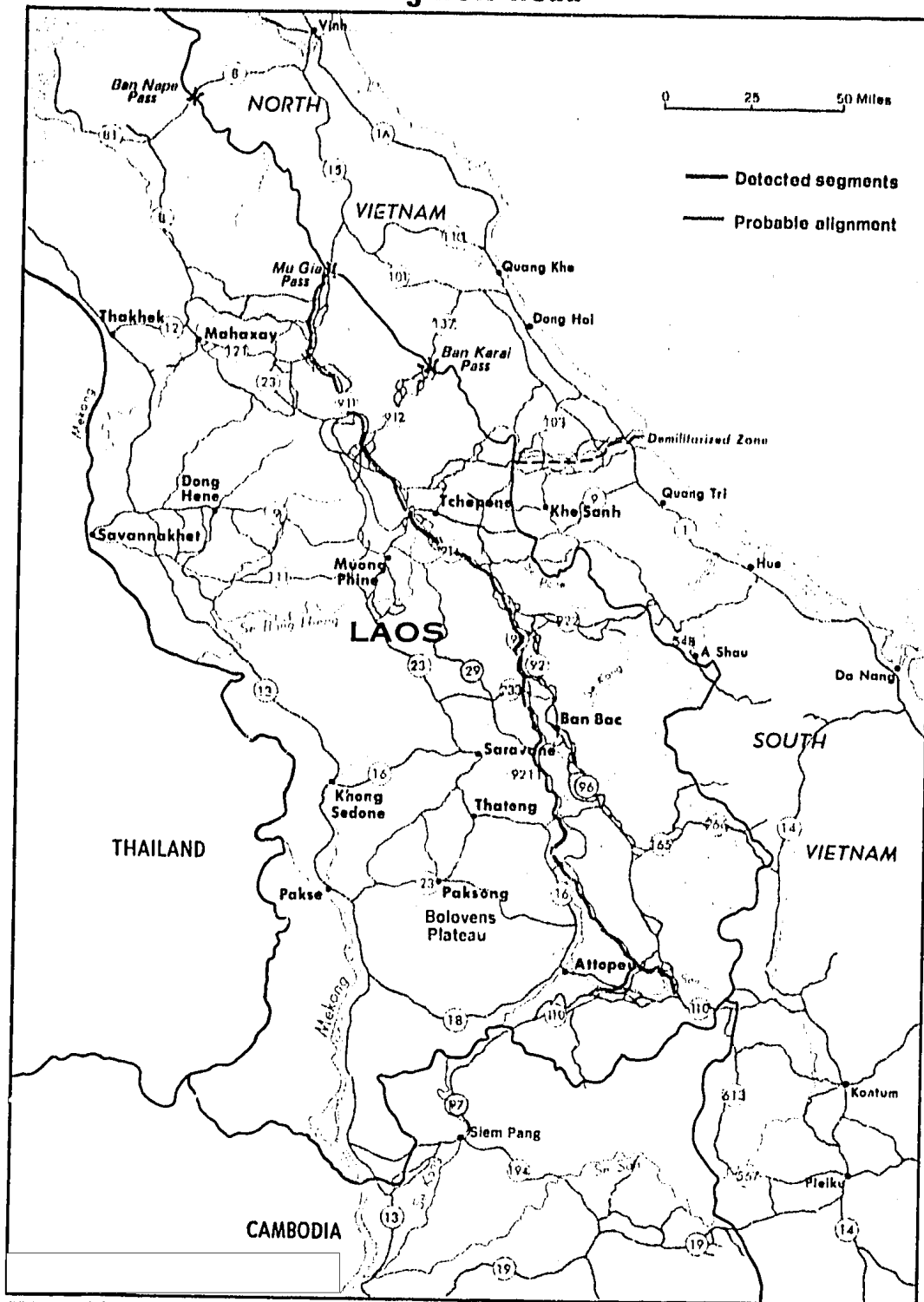
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North Vietnamese Building New Road



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LAOS

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The Communist Panhandle Highway

The North Vietnamese appear to be building a major new road along the length of the Lao panhandle. Aerial photography [] has revealed road crews and bulldozers working on 52 miles of new roadbed along widely scattered segments of the existing central supply corridor route. The location of these segments and the similarity of design suggest that they eventually will be joined in one 300-mile highway from the Ban Karai and Mu Gia passes in the north to the southern Lao border. At the present pace, the work could be completed by next spring or even earlier.

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The new road will be far superior to those previously constructed by the North Vietnamese in the Lao panhandle. North Vietnamese-built roads in Laos have been single lane and have not had extensive protection from the effects of monsoon rains. The new segments, however, are wide enough for two lanes. Drainage ditches have been dug on either side of the road and culverts are being built in some areas.

The construction of the highway is clear evidence of the continuing importance of the Laotian infiltration corridor to Hanoi. The new road will increase the North Vietnamese capability to move supplies through Laos in all seasons and presumably will supplement a road of similar design and capacity that was recently built from the North Vietnamese border directly through Communist-controlled territory in the northern portion of South Vietnam. []

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SOUTH VIETNAM

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Thieu Considering Southeast Asian
Travel This Month

President Thieu apparently is following through with plans to visit some capitals in Southeast Asia as a goodwill gesture. His close adviser and information chief, Hoang Duc Nha, made a trip to Singapore in late June to try to arrange a visit sometime in July.

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Rumors that Thieu would soon visit several Southeast Asian countries circulated in Saigon shortly after his return from the US in April. The rumors were denied quickly after an Australian spokesman declared that Thieu would not be welcome there. At that time, an official in President Thieu's entourage told the US Embassy that a plan was "in gestation" for Thieu to visit some capitals, such as Bangkok and Manila, to thank these countries personally for aid to South Vietnam.

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Heavy GVN Air Strikes in Kontum
Province

The South Vietnamese apparently have conducted heavy air strikes against Communist military and administrative areas at Dak To in northern Kontum Province. The strikes were an attempt to counter the strong Communist resistance to government efforts to recapture two villages west of Kontum City in the highlands. 10 to 20 aircraft were observed returning to the South Vietnamese air base at Pleiku City after hitting the Communist encampment around noon on 2 July.

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The commanding general of South Vietnam's 2nd Air Division, which operates in the western highlands, told a US officer on 3 July that air strikes had been conducted against Dak To 2, which includes the principal airstrip and several administrative buildings. He said there were no government losses from the strikes, but Canadian ICCS observers at nearby Ben Het reported seeing one aircraft crash shortly after making a run on the airfield.

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Heavy fighting was reported on 3 July in Kontum Province, the only area in the country where both sides continue to engage in fairly heavy military action. The air strikes are not likely to improve the situation and the Communists may react with stronger attacks, possibly perhaps against Kontum or Pleiku city.

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Infighting at the Presidential
Palace

Friction reportedly has arisen recently between Prime Minister Khiem and Information Commissioner Hoang Duc Nha over appointments to several government posts that normally fall under the prime minister's jurisdiction. President Thieu rejected Khiem's choices for three of these positions and selected proteges of Nha to fill two. Some of Nha's associates believe the appointments reflect a campaign by Nha to oust Khiem.

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Khiem's influence with Thieu has been limited for some time, while Nha has become the President's closest adviser. Despite his strong position in the Palace, Nha--a young civilian and Thieu's cousin--may still regard Khiem--a senior military figure--as a natural rival and a threat to his position. There is little evidence, however, that Nha is actually seeking Khiem's removal or that Thieu would go along.

Both Nha and another young civilian presidential aide, Nguyen Van Ngan, have been harshly criticized in private by older political and military figures in the government who have less influence with Thieu. Rural Development Minister Nguyen Van Ngai recently charged that Ngan was trying to eliminate rivals and expand his own power. Ngai has been involved in planning the government's campaign for the upcoming Senate election, and he apparently is miffed because Ngan has been put in charge of the campaign.

Rivalry among presidential advisers and government ministers probably has been present during most, if not all, of President Thieu's term in office. Reports on these frictions have frequently provided insight into the degree of power and influence exercised by the various members of Thieu's inner circle and the pressures that may be operating on Thieu and other top officials. Although there have been few signs that government effectiveness has been impaired, these rivalries represent a potential threat to stability, particularly in combination with external pressures.

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INTERNATIONAL

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Le Duan, Pham Van Dong to the USSR

North Vietnamese leaders Le Duan and Pham Van Dong will travel to the USSR later this month to learn first hand what the latest developments in Soviet-US relations mean for them and to conclude the annual aid agreements. The North Vietnamese, who regard Moscow's generosity on aid matters as the litmus of Soviet intentions, are playing up alleged Chinese largesse during recent Sino-Vietnamese negotiations to strengthen their bargaining position vis-a-vis the Soviets.

The ploy may work, but probably not to the degree it has in the past. Moscow's decision to accredit an ambassador to the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, for example, suggests that the USSR is prepared to accede to Hanoi's wishes and recognize the PRG as the "sole legitimate representative of the South Vietnamese people" rather than merely "the legitimate representative" as before. Moscow will avoid harsh criticism of the US and will reiterate the need for all parties to abide by the Vietnam cease-fire accords.

The Soviets will, of course, agree to provide North Vietnam with additional economic and military support, but much of the aid will probably be economic--for "building socialism in the North." It is clear that the USSR wants to keep the Indochina problem on the back burner so the USSR can get on with detente with the US; Moscow should be in no mood to encourage military adventurism on Hanoi's part.

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